



HISTORICAL OVERVIEW of THE DEPRESSION & WORLD WAR 2

with **Jim Soto**

DEFINING THE 20th CENTURY

As the **Great Depression** following the financial collapse of 1929 worsened, Americans looked for distraction from their destitution through popular culture, particularly movies and radio. However, many American authors refused to divert their attention from the nation's woes. The horrors of **World War II** were captured in firsthand accounts published just after the war, documenting the atrocities of **the Holocaust** and the harsh realities of atomic bombing of Hiroshima.



The **Southern Renaissance** movement and the **Southern Gothic** literary tradition renewed the South's artistic sensibility and influenced generations of writers throughout the 20th century. Why is it that hard times can often inspire creativity?



THE GREAT DEPRESSION



The financial collapse of 1929 initiated the Great Depression. Although the easy credit that fueled soaring stock values during the 1920s was one cause of the Depression, other factors were the global economic downturn after World War I, overproduction, and unequal distribution of income in the United States. Had workers received better wages and farmers better prices for their crops, they would have boosted the economy and lessened the effects of the Depression.



In the midst of the Depression, most rich people went on with their lives as usual. Seeing suffering from a safe distance.

Some were in a position to take advantage of it for their own benefit.

Millions were out of work, families waited in breadlines for a crust of bread and watery soup, tenants were turned out of their homes, and factory workers went on strike. Farmers in debt lost their land.

One study cited estimates that the percentage of people in poverty in 1932 was an astonishing 78 percent in 1932. That translates to about 98 million people.

A NEW DEAL

Angry with President's Hoover lackluster policies to fix the Depression, voters overwhelmingly elected Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932. FDR had pledged a "new deal for the American people," including direct relief for the needy, a massive public works program, and regulation of the stock market. In general, the **New Deal** looked to stabilize the U.S. financial system, provide relief and jobs to the suffering, and reenergize America's capitalist economy. He achieved this last objective by building partnerships between business and government to improve industrial production.



Following are the top eight programs of the New Deal.

1. **Civilian Conservation Corps** – It was created in 1933 to combat unemployment. This work relief program had the desired effect and provided jobs for many during the Great Depression. The CCC was responsible for building many public works and created structures and trails in parks across the U.S.

2. **Civil Works Administration** - The CWA was created in 1933 to create jobs for the unemployed. Its focus on high paying jobs in the construction arena resulted in a greater expense to the federal government than first anticipated.

3. **Federal Housing Administration** - The FHA was created to combat the housing crisis of the Great Depression. The large number of unemployed workers combined with the banking crisis created a situation in which banks recalled loans. The FHA was designed to regulate mortgages and housing conditions.

4. **Federal Security Agency** - The agency oversaw food and drug safety, education funding, administration of public health programs, and the Social Security old-age pension plan.

5. Home Owner's Loan Corporation - created in 1933, it assisted the refinancing of homes. The housing crisis created a great many foreclosures, and Franklin Roosevelt hoped this new agency would stem the tide. In fact, between 1933 and 1935 one million people received long term loans through the agency that saved their homes from foreclosure.

6. Public Works Administration - Was a program created to provide economic stimulus and jobs during the Depression. The PWA was designed to create public works and continued until the US ramped up wartime production for the war.

7. Social Security Act - Was designed to combat the widespread poverty among senior citizens. The government program provided income to retired wage earners. The program became one of the most popular government programs and is funded by current wage earners and their employers.

8. Tennessee Valley Authority - Was established in 1933 to develop the economy in the Tennessee Valley region which had been hit very hard by the Depression. The TVA was and is a federally owned corporation that works in this region to this day. It is the largest public provider of electricity in the U.S.

Reacting to economic hardship and fighting between political parties, Europeans welcomed ultranationalist leaders. In Spain, it was **Francisco Franco** and the Fascists; in Italy, **Benito Mussolini** and the Black shirts; and in Germany, **Adolf Hitler** and the Nazis. Expounding mystical, pseudoscientific theories of racial purity and a belief that the so-called Aryan race was destined to rule the world, Hitler initiated a campaign to conquer new territories.



MOVING TOWARDS WAR

World War I was called “the war to end all wars,” but events soon showed that title unrealistic. In 1936, Germany and Italy formed the Axis military alliance, which later would include Japan. Germany began taking territories to its east, Italy moved into Africa, and Japan invaded Asia.



With Adolph Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939, England and France recognized the dangers they now faced and declared war on Germany. In the next six months, Hitler's **blitzkrieg** crashed through defenses in France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, Denmark, and Norway; the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic countries; and Italy joined the war.

Roosevelt became increasingly worried about Axis aggression and pushed for the Lend-Lease Act to provide needed materials to England, which was standing alone against Germany. The U.S. entered the conflict after Japan's December 7, 1941, surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, crippled the U.S. Navy.



WORLD WAR II



When the United States entered the war, the Allied and Axis powers had been fighting for two years. In the Pacific theater of the war, Japanese troops defeated American and Filipino forces. However, naval victories at the Battles of Coral Sea and Midway allowed the U.S. to turn the war effort around. In Europe, 1944 saw the D-Day invasion to retake France, the final Battle of the Bulge in the West, and the Soviet drive to Berlin in the East.



On the home front, wartime industrial mobilization lifted the U.S. economy out of the last years of the Great Depression. Women entered the armed forces in larger numbers than ever, and others took over jobs formerly held almost exclusively by men.

When the U.S. government declared people of Japanese ancestry a security threat, those living on the West Coast were forced from their homes and into internment camps for 3 years. Around three-fourths of the 120,000 people in these camps in 1942 were American born.

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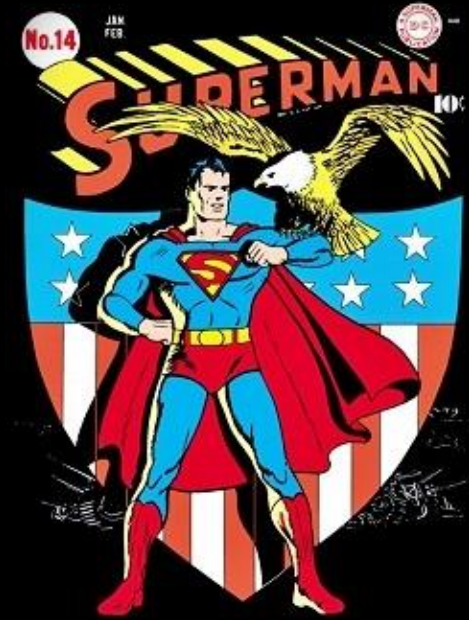
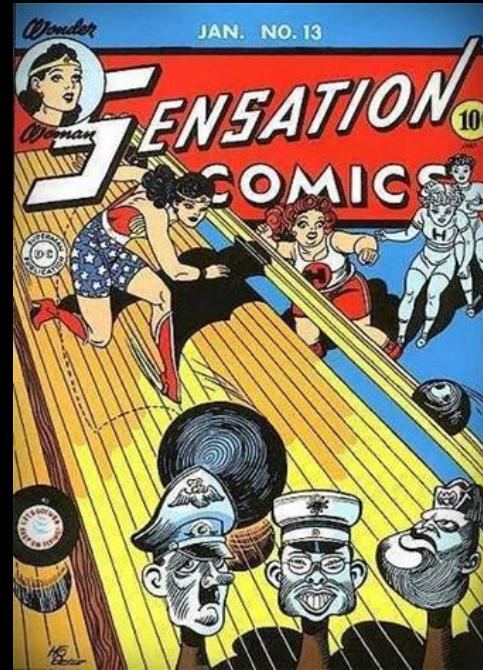
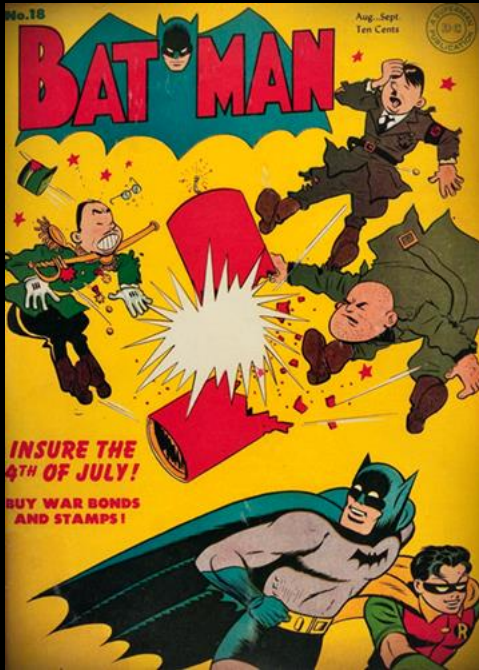
Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, a week after Hitler's suicide. After retaking Guadalcanal and Guam in the western Pacific, American forces destroyed most of the Japanese fleet in the Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. Japan surrendered August 15, 1945, just days after the United States dropped atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



Important moral issues many pondered upon after the war, included:

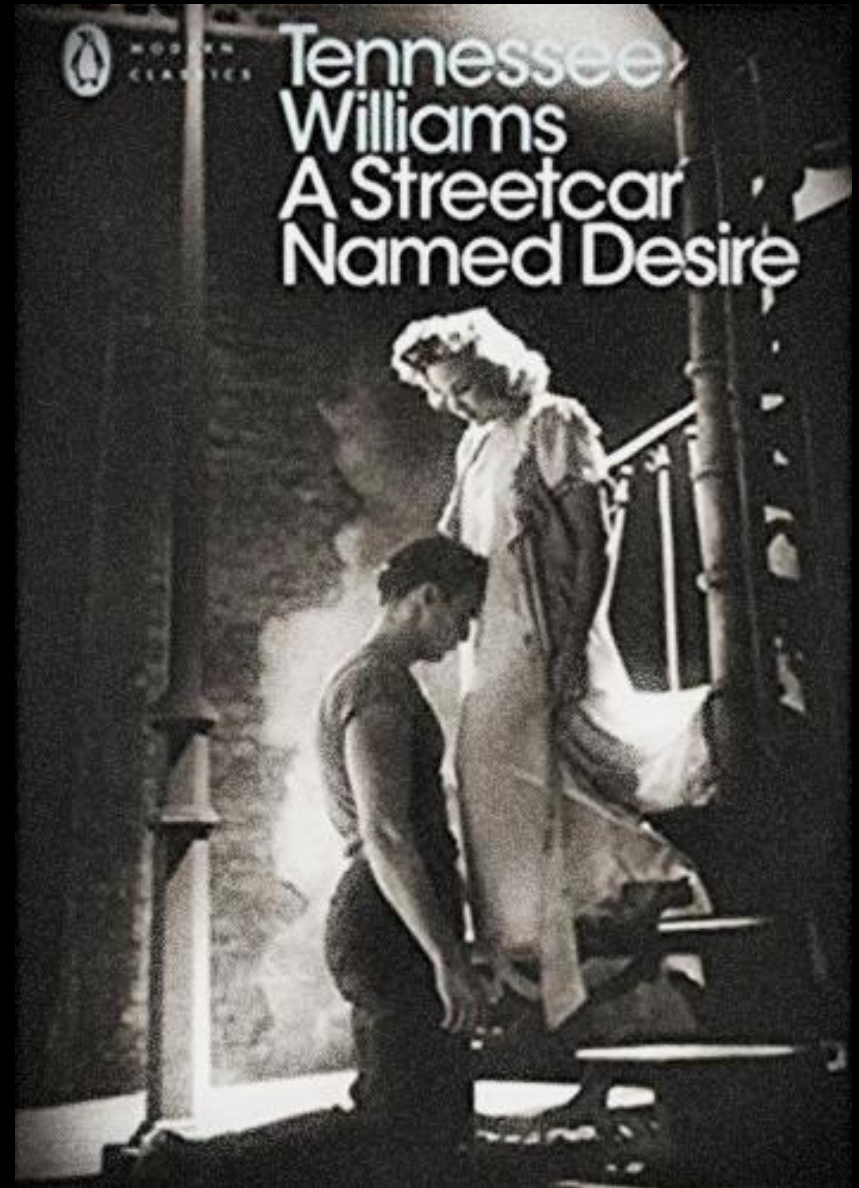
1. the systematic campaign to exterminate millions of Jews, Gypsies, and others in death camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Buchenwald;
2. Japan's destruction of Nanking,
3. the Allied firebombing of civilian Dresden,
4. and the United States' dropping of a second atomic bomb.





Comic books became popular around World War II due to a demand for escapism, accessibility and affordability, government promotion of patriotism (with many comic book publishers produced stories featuring superheroes fighting the enemies of the country,) and the introduction of iconic characters like Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman during the Golden Age of Comics.

World War II had a significant impact on American literature, marked by an increased focus on themes of **existentialism, alienation, and loss of innocence**. The experiences of soldiers, veterans, and civilians during the war were depicted in works of fiction, poetry, and drama, such as Joseph Heller's "Catch-22," and Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire." The war also had a deep effect on the modernist movement in American literature, as writers sought to come to terms with the enormity of the conflict and its aftermath.





The war years saw the rise of the **Beat Generation**, a group of writers who rejected conventional social norms and celebrated the counterculture, which had a lasting influence on American literature and popular culture.

ASSESSMENT

After reading pages 460–464 in your book, complete the following activities:

- Examine the timeline on pages 460–461 of your textbook. For what three general topics does the timeline provide dates?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

- The timeline has four time frames. Identify the time span of each time frame.

4. _____ 6. _____

5. _____ 7. _____

- Find the following dates on the time line in your textbook. Complete the chart by telling what happened in those years. Then answer the questions on the next page.

Date	American Literature	American History	World History
1932			
1933			
1939			
1941			
1945			

8. What relationships do you find between events of 1932 and 1939?

9. In what respects were the seeds of both the beginning and end of World War II sown in 1932?

10. What 1941 event marked a turning point for the United States? Why?

- Complete the outline. Write two sentences summarizing information given in each section on pages 462–464 of your textbook.

A. The Great Depression and 1930s Radicalism

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. A New Deal

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

C. Moving Toward War

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

D. World War II

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____



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